



*Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion*

**Abdul Hamid Suleiman**

**and the Origins of the Moorish Science Temple**

**Patrick D. Bowen**

[pbowen303@gmail.com](mailto:pbowen303@gmail.com)

In 1923, a story coming out of New Jersey was picked up by the well-known national literary magazine *The Smart Set*. A man, claiming to have religious authority derived from his connection to Mecca, had

begun a movement for spreading Mohammedanism among the negroes of the United States. Moslem groups have been started in New Jersey, one of them at Newark, where a mosque has been established. From there the Islamic missionaries will move upon the South.<sup>1</sup>

The figure leading this movement had, several months earlier, made headlines in various U.S. newspapers. In one front-page article, this man of African descent was depicted wearing a fez and it was reported that he had been proclaiming his movement to be both Islamic and Masonic—a “Mohammedan Masonry”—and spoke of his mystical and Egyptian connections.<sup>2</sup> It was later relayed that he had been leading a number of New York City Muslims in attempting to “win Negroes to their Mohammedan faith by stressing the fact of the absolute equality of races and genuine brotherhood under Mohammedanism, as in opposition to the well-known attitude of white Christians.”<sup>3</sup>

Those familiar with the histories of either Islam in the U.S. or African-American religions might assume that the man leading this movement was none other than Noble Drew Ali, the fez-wearing figure widely recognized for being one of the main early popularizers of Islam among African Americans, and who claimed to have started his movement—which was infused with Masonic, esoteric, and mystical symbols and doctrines, as well as references to his Egyptian and

---

<sup>1</sup> “New Jersey,” *The Smart Set* 72 (October 1923): 10.

<sup>2</sup> “Mecca High Priest Would Put Negro Shriners in Right,” *New York World*, September 2, 1922, 1, 6.

<sup>3</sup> “N.Y. to Have Mohammedan Mosque,” *Afro-American*, July 27, 1923, 2.

Meccan connections—in Newark, only becoming widely recognized in the second half of the 1920s while in Chicago.<sup>4</sup> This assumption, however, would be wrong.

The man who was leading this movement went by the name of Abdul Hamid Suleiman and was definitely not the same person as Drew Ali. Still, the numerous similarities between these two men, between the dates, locations, and names of their movements, and between their messages and symbols used, in addition to very curious rumors about the origins of Drew Ali's group, suggest that their having these connections was due to more than mere coincidence. This essay brings to light the figure of Suleiman and examines the possibility that he was an important influence for Drew Ali and his Moorish Science Temple (MST).<sup>5</sup> The findings presented here will show that it is highly probable that Abdul Hamid Suleiman and his movement influenced Noble Drew Ali. Furthermore, it raises the question of whether Drew Ali had in fact been a member—as opposed to the leader—of the movement connected to Suleiman. Part I of this essay will present the evidence, largely drawn from newspaper articles and court and census records, connected to the figure known as Abdul Hamid Suleiman; Part II will do two things: it will begin by presenting the MST-associated evidence, which is primarily the legends that

---

<sup>4</sup> Among the most useful scholarly works on Drew Ali and his movement are Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1993), 13-50; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, *Mission to America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 80-104; Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 10-18; Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 90-107; Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26-31; Edward E. Curtis, IV, *Islam in Black America* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 45-62; Ernest Allen, Jr., "Identity and Destiny: The Formative Views of the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam," in *Muslims on the Americanization Path?*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 163-214; Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Drew Ali's group had several different names, but the words "Moorish," "Science," and "Temple" usually appear in all the manifestations. I have chosen "MST," therefore, as term to reference all the different versions.

describe Drew Ali's career in Newark prior to 1925, then it will analyze the evidence from Parts I and II to determine, as much as possible, the extent of the connection between Suleiman and Drew Ali.

Before proceeding, three features about this article should be explained. Suleiman, to my knowledge, has, except for in a footnote briefly mentioning him in connection to a tangential topic,<sup>6</sup> never before been discussed in an academic context. As a result, 1) there are a number of relevant details that should be presented in as a precise a manner as possible. Therefore, this article will use several long quotations, as I feel this will best convey the heretofore unexamined details of this interesting figure. 2) Many of the facts examined here will be in the context of things that have remained little clarified by scholars, particularly the early years of the MST and of the African-American Shriner organizations. Because of this, there will be numerous questions raised that cannot yet be answered, and several hypotheses will be proposed in hopes that future research will directly address each of the issues presented in this article. 3) Lastly, because this article spends considerable time presenting Suleiman and examining specific issues concerning his likely connection to Drew Ali, not much attention will be given to the peripheral details of MST doctrine and history. Footnote 4 provides the reader with the key academic sources for those topics.

---

<sup>6</sup> I am referring to the figure known specifically as "Abdul Hamid Suleiman." See Dannin, 278 n.25. Dannin's source here is Voorhis' *Our Colored Brethren*, which was also published under the title *Negro Masonry in the United States*, and was reprinted in 1995. The context for this reference will be discussed below. Dannin also incorrectly assumes that Abdul Hamid Suleiman was the same person as Sufi Abdul Hamid, a black labor activist (born Eugene Brown) who appeared in Harlem in the 1930s and who used some elements of Islam in his message. However, photographs and descriptions of each man confirm that they were definitely not the same person. Perhaps it is possible that Sufi was aware of and borrowed his name from Suleiman?

## **Part I: Abdul Hamid Suleiman**

We know very little about the background of the man known as Abdul Hamid Suleiman. While he made several claims, few have been substantiated and there are reasons to question some of his assertions, as we will see over the course of the next few sections. The evidence that we are fairly sure of, however, paints a picture of an immigrant “Egyptian” Muslim who was committed to Muslim unity, the uplift of African Americans, mysticism, and Freemasonry.

### ***Before 1922: The Mecca Medina Temple and Dr. Prince de Solomon***

The man going by the name of Abdul Hamid Suleiman appears to have first achieved recognition in the public press in August 1922 after he attended the African-American Masonic convention held that month in Washington, D.C. At the convention, he formally presented himself to the leadership of the main faction of the African-American Shriner community, known as the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (AEAONMS). There, Suleiman communicated to<sup>7</sup> the group’s head, Caesar R. Blake, Jr., his demand for the AEAONMS to come under the protection of what he called the “Mecca Medina temple of Ancient Free and Operative Masons from 1 to 96 degrees,” the “true Shrine,” which, in a later interview, Suleiman claimed to have incorporated himself in New York City, though he gave no date for its

---

<sup>7</sup> Because of conflicting reports, it is unclear as to whether Blake was present in Washington, though it is almost certain that he was not.

incorporation.<sup>8</sup> The news report, which contained a picture of the man, who clearly looked to be of African descent, indicated that he was an “Arabian.”<sup>9</sup>

By the end of the month, Suleiman had written a letter to *The New York World* newspaper providing more information about his background:

I, Abdul Hamid Suleiman, of the City of Khartum, Sudan, Egypt,<sup>10</sup> a Mohammedan by birth, Master of the Koran, having pilgrimaged [sic] to Mecca three times and thus become an Eminent High Priest and head of all Masonic degrees in Mecca, Arabia, from the first to the ninety-sixth degree, am now in the United States for the purpose of establishing the rite of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine.<sup>11</sup> ... I am here to answer all questions relative to these degrees until I return home to Mecca to enroll the names of the true Shriners of this country.<sup>12</sup>

Reporters who interviewed Blake about Suleiman discovered other biographical information: he claimed to be seventy-seven years old, and Blake, who had several conversations with the man, took him to be “what he represents himself to be,” that is to say, he accepted as authentic the biographical details Suleiman claimed. It was also noted that although Suleiman was very dark-skinned, he had “the blue eyes that characterized Egyptians of the purer type.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, Suleiman claimed at this time that he had begun his naturalization paperwork. Currently, however, there is no outside evidence that a man with his name had either immigrated to the U.S.

---

<sup>8</sup> “Egyptian Ex-High Priest Declares There Are No True Shriners Among Either Colored or White Americans,” *New York Age*, September 16, 1927, 1.

<sup>9</sup> “The Sheriff of Mecca,” *Chicago Defender*, August 26, 1922, 9.

<sup>10</sup> The Sudan was considered part of Egypt at that time.

<sup>11</sup> This was the official name of the white Shriner organization.

<sup>12</sup> “Mecca High Priest,” 1.

<sup>13</sup> “Negro Shrine Leader Here Declines Egyptian Offer,” *Charlotte News*, September 6, 1922, 7.

at all or filed for a petition for naturalization in New York or New Jersey between 1917 and 1925.<sup>14</sup>

As for the existence of a “Mecca Medina temple of Ancient Free and Operative Masons,” for evidence of it from places other than Suleiman’s own statements, I have found only three references to organizations with this or a closely related name. A “Mecca Medina Temple of A.F. & A.M.” filed for incorporation on July 15, 1920 in Youngstown, Ohio.<sup>15</sup> Ten years prior to this, on February 4, 1910, it was reported that an African-American Masonic lodge by the exact name referred to by Suleiman had been incorporated in New York City “with the approval of Supreme Court Justice Gerard.”<sup>16</sup> This news brief notes that “[a]mong the incorporators are the Rev. Robert B. Mount and Dr. Prince de Solomon.”<sup>17</sup> On February 20<sup>th</sup>, another news brief indicated that a Henry Ratleray of Long Island City was made the director of the organization.<sup>18</sup> I have found no other mentions of a Henry Ratleray. And, while there are a few newspaper references to a Robert B. Mount, none indicate any Masonic or Islamic ties. Who these two figures are, then, and their relation to any future Islamic movement, therefore, remain uncertain. The name of the third man, however,—the Dr. Prince de Solomon—may provide us with some clues.

---

<sup>14</sup> I am making this claim based on a search I conducted for the man on Ancestry.com as well as a search of the following records by Archives Technician Dennis R. Riley at the New York National Archives & Records Administration: US Court for the Eastern District of New York, 1907-1925; US Court for the Southern District of New York, 1917-1929; US District Court for New Jersey, Camden Division, 1932-1981; and US District Court for New Jersey, Trenton Division, 1838-1967. Mr. Riley has informed me that “Currently the indexes to the US District Court for New Jersey, Newark Division, are unavailable.” Email correspondence with the author, June 28, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Ohio Secretary of State, *Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio*, compiled by Harvey c. Smith (Springfield, OH: Kelly-Springfield Printing Company, 1921), 41.

<sup>16</sup> I have not been able to locate any incorporation records for such a group.

<sup>17</sup> “Negro Free Masons Incorporate,” *New Brunswick Times*, February 4, 1910, 2.

<sup>18</sup> “Long Island Directors,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 20, 1910, 2.

First, it should be pointed out that the name Suleiman (and its various spellings) is merely the Islamic version of the name Solomon. When we take this into consideration along with the fact that, as noted above, Suleiman claimed that he himself had incorporated in New York City a Mecca Medina Temple, it suggests the possibility that Suleiman and de Solomon are the same person. However, I have found no records of incorporation for *any* group using the phrase in their title “Mecca Medina Temple” in either New York or New Jersey. Therefore, based on the above evidence alone, we cannot say with confidence whether Suleiman’s Mecca Medina Temple (if he did indeed incorporate one) was the same as Mount and de Solomon’s. But there is more evidence.

The earliest reference<sup>19</sup> that I have found for the name Dr. Prince de Solomon is in connection with a Rev. R. R. Mont (perhaps the same person as Robert B. Mount?) and a Rev. Robert Passley. All three were speakers one night in October 1909 at a place called the “Clubhouse,” located at 322 W. 59<sup>th</sup> St.<sup>20</sup> Another reference to the man comes in 1913, after he was arraigned on a complaint from his wife, Lulu, who said he had threatened to murder her. Lulu insisted that she would not return to their home if she knew her husband was not in jail, so de Solomon promised to authorities that he would stay away from her<sup>21</sup>—an event that may be a harbinger of another to reportedly have taken place with Suleiman, as we will see below. Finally, a similar name connected to attributes that we know are associated with the de Solomon

---

<sup>19</sup> I have found a 1906 reference to a black Baptist named “Rev. Dr. P. D. Solomon,” but whether this is the same figure as Prince de Solomon is unknown. See “Colored Baptists,” *The Sun* (Baltimore), June 10, 1906, 7.

<sup>20</sup> “Political Meetings,” *Evening Post* (New York), October 28, 1909, 7.

<sup>21</sup> “Threatened His Wife,” *Poughkeepsie New York Daily Eagle*, February [25?], 1913, [8?].

described above appears in two U.S. census reports. The first occurrence is with a Prince De Salomon or De Solomon, listed as a lodger at a building in the twelfth ward of Manhattan in the 1910 census. Here he is described as a single, forty-six-year-old black African who had immigrated in 1908; he was literate (in English, presumably), and in the column titled “occupation” is written the phrase “own income.”<sup>22</sup> This 1910 date, his race, and the New York connection are consistent with the Dr. Prince de Solomon described above. The other census listing is for 1920 (recorded in January of that year); this time the person’s name is Dr. Prince D. Solomon, a single, black, fifty-year-old Arabic-speaking Egyptian. His profession is listed as “minister” and he was residing as a boarder in the town of Mercer in Pennsylvania, just thirty miles from Youngstown, Ohio where, as we have seen, a Mecca Medina Temple would be organized in July of that same year.<sup>23</sup>

The similarities between the various Prince de Solomons and between them and Suleiman are clear. It is my opinion that Suleiman and de Solomon were probably the same person: He was a black “Egyptian” (recognizing that, at the time, Sudan was officially part of Egypt); he was an Arabic speaker (i.e., an Arab, or an “Arabian,” as the 1922 newspaper article described Suleiman); he worked as a “minister” (i.e., a promoter of religion); and he had immigrated at some point before his October 1909 appearance, possibly in 1908. When all this evidence is linked together with the information we have about Suleiman, the picture that emerges suggests

---

<sup>22</sup> Ancestry.com, “1910 United States Federal Census” [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006, <http://0-search.ancestrylibrary.com/bianca.penlib.du.edu/Browse/View.aspx?dbid=7884&path=New+York.New+York.Manhattan+Ward+12.0537.11> (accessed August 6, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Ancestry.com, “1920 United States Federal Census” [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006, <http://0-search.ancestrylibrary.com/bianca.penlib.du.edu/Browse/View.aspx?dbid=7884&path=New+York.New+York.Manhattan+Ward+12.0537.11> (accessed August 6, 2011).

that the Mecca Medina Temple was an African-American Islamic-themed Masonry or Shriner group led by Suleiman/de Solomon who established it in 1910 in New York and spread it at least to Youngstown, Ohio by 1920. We know next to nothing about his activities between 1910 and 1920 except for a single event in 1913: his arrest for threatening his wife's life. It seems that in 1922 Suleiman/de Solomon was taking a new course of action—reaching out to the African-American Masons and Shriners by claiming his group had a high-level position in the Masonic world. And then, as we saw in the introduction, by 1923 he was leading an overtly Islamic movement.

Without other direct evidence, however, the *facts* concerning the activities of the Mecca Medina Temple and the connection between de Solomon and Suleiman remain obscure, though it seems likely that the group was one of the many African-American Masonic factions that had been springing up since 1894, inspired by the rhetoric of the black Shriner movement.<sup>24</sup> It should be noted, too, that in a different news article, Suleiman is said to be representing the “Mecca-Medina Temple, in Arabia”;<sup>25</sup> and while it is likely simply a reference to his purported New York organization, we cannot say this with certainty. In any case, and even if we do not go as far as insisting that Suleiman and de Solomon were one and the same, the Mecca Medina Temple links alone increase the likelihood that there may be more to the story of Suleiman's time in the U.S. than he let on in 1922. As we will see now, at that time Suleiman did not publically emphasize any earlier religious or Masonic work he may have done while in the U.S. Instead, he

---

<sup>24</sup> See Joseph A. Walkes, Jr., *History of the Shrine: Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, Inc. (Prince Hall Affiliated) A Pillar of Black Society, 1893-1993* (Detroit: Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine of North and South America and Its Jurisdictions, Inc. (P.H.A.), 1993), 32-52.

<sup>25</sup> “Negro Shrine Leader.”

focused on presenting an image of a man deeply connected to some of the highest levels of *international Masonic and Islamic authority*.

### ***The New York World interview***

In response to Suleiman's letter, the *World* sent a reporter to his residence of 143 West 130<sup>th</sup> St. where the two talked for four hours. Suleiman told the reporter that he was aware of the white Shriners' attempts to sue the AEAONMS in order to prevent them from having their own separate Shriner organization; and Suleiman was "arranging to receive" the African-American Masons and Shriners into his "Mohammedan Masonry."<sup>26</sup> He insisted that African Americans did not have an authentic Masonic charter, but he would "now...make them authentic by virtue of his authority as Eminent High Priest to grant a charter in a Masonry which he declares to be ancient and widespread throughout the Mohammedan world."<sup>27</sup> Suleiman said that U.S. blacks would be allowed into his group on two conditions: that they vow, "'by the beard of the prophet,' that they will live according to the moral code of the Koran,"<sup>28</sup>—"becoming... Mohammedans," as one newspaper described it<sup>29</sup>—and "that they will pay to Mecca, through none but Suleiman, a proportion of their lodge dues."<sup>30</sup>

Suleiman presented three items to the reporter in order to prove his authenticity. The first was a letter from Blake which "showed without doubt that negotiations [for joining with

---

<sup>26</sup> AEAONMS historian Joseph Walkes estimated there to be 9,000 in the AEAONMS in 1921. Walkes, 145.

<sup>27</sup> "Mecca High Priest," 1, 6.

<sup>28</sup> "Mecca High Priest," 6.

<sup>29</sup> "Negro Shrine Leader."

<sup>30</sup> "Mecca High Priest," 6.

Suleiman were] under way.” The second item Suleiman exhibited was his fez, which he claimed to have had worn “for fifteen years as high priest in Mecca.”<sup>31</sup> This fez, however, was exactly like the one used by white Shriners at the local “Mecca”<sup>32</sup> Shriner temple in New York. It had the word “Mecca”—in English—embroidered on the front above the Shriner symbols of the scimitar, the downward-turned crescent, and a five-pointed star. When asked why “Mecca” was not written in Arabic, Suleiman gave an evasive answer and changed topics. Next, he presented to the reporter his “patent” and only credential as High Priest, saying that not only was it “signed by Hassan Hissein, Grand Sherif of Mecca,”<sup>33</sup> but that it also indicated Suleiman’s Masonic authority. The reporter described this patent:

It was a nice sheet of white paper about two feet by three, with a field of blue sky, down the centre of which ran a wide column of sprawling characters bearing a ragged resemblance of the Arabic lettering in the Koran. The borders were decorated with three camels on one side and three pyramids on the other and various symbolic stones, incense pots, beehives, square and compasses. At the top was the English lettering, “MECCA ARABIA,” and below it, “A.F. & O.M.” [which was explained as standing for] “Ancient, Free and Operative Masonry.”<sup>34</sup>

When asked again why there was English lettering, Suleiman replied: “Because I was to come to America.” Later, Suleiman explained that “only the Arabic in the centre of the patent was written in Mecca. ... [and] the borders were put on in America.” The reporter noted that

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> The Shriner meeting-places—temples—had Islamic-themed names, such as “Mecca Temple” and “Allah Temple.”

<sup>33</sup> The actual name of the Sharif of Mecca at the time was Sayyid Hussein bin Ali.

<sup>34</sup> “Mecca High Priest,” 6.

Suleiman “did not explain how the black ink of Mecca happened to be exactly the same quality as the black ink of New York.”<sup>35</sup>

Next, Suleiman made some interesting remarks about the Qur’an and Islamic Masonry. He insisted that the Qur’an “was written in 410 B.C.,” that “Christ was a Shriner: he is mentioned in the Koran,” and, to explain how it was possible that a book written 410 years before Christ could include Him, that “The Koran was rewritten about the time of Christ ... and the references were put in then.” As for Islamic Masonry, Suleiman informed the reporter that it

pervades the whole Mohammedan world and controls both religious worship and civil government—that the titles of sherif, sheik, pasha, khedive, marabout, sahib are nothing but the topmost of the Masonic degrees, in this order given, with the sherif as the highest. ... [Furthermore] these titles will be open to American Negroes who join...<sup>36</sup>

Towards the end of the interview Suleiman, the reporter writes in the article’s last paragraphs,

had decided that perhaps it would be better to use the name Nobles of Sahara for his adherents in this country instead of Shriners and that they had better not use the insignia he wears. He thinks the proper insignia will be the seal of Pharaoh, pictured in a Sunday supplement a few weeks ago as excavated at the ruins of Carchemish.

“Pharaoh was a Shriner,” he said.<sup>37</sup>

### ***A Muslim Mason and mystic?***

As can be presumed by his questions and his pointing out inconsistencies in Suleiman’s stories, the *World* reporter found Suleiman’s claims less than convincing. And, after

---

<sup>35</sup> Blake claimed that in Washington, D.C. Suleiman offered to authenticate his credentials by writing those credentials out in Arabic. No one present could read what Suleiman had written, however, and the document “was turned over to the State Department which at last accounts was still trying to decipher it.” “Shriners Reject Alleged Fake African Envoy,” *Afro-American*, September 15, 1922, 4.

<sup>36</sup> “Mecca High Priest,” 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

interviewing Suleiman, for the article the reporter consulted “American Missionaries and American Consuls who [had] spent years in Arabia and other Mohammedan countries” and who all indicated that they had never heard of Islamic Masonry. They further insisted that Suleiman’s “declaration about the titles [sherif, sheik, etc.] [was] nonsense.”<sup>38</sup> Blake, for his part, did not deny the existence of Islamic Masonry, but insisted, just as the founder of the African-American Shriner movement, John G. Jones, had before him,<sup>39</sup> that African-American Shriners were not Muslims and would not be willing to convert—“American Negroes are Christians. That settles it.”<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, he added, the AEAONMS would not like to be under the jurisdiction or influence of any foreign body, and that the African-American (i.e., Prince Hall) Masons were fully authenticated and legally established.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, there may be reason to think that Blake (and perhaps African-American Shriners generally) was at one point truly interested in what Suleiman had to say. First, as noted above, Blake had several conversations and at least one written correspondence with Suleiman, and, if we are to believe Suleiman, Blake had initially agreed to have his group join up with the Mecca Medina Temple. Second, there is evidence to suggest that earlier that year Blake had shown interest in the Ahmadis, who were at that time leading what is believed to have been the

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> See Jones’s *The Secret Ritual of the Secret Work of the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine* (Washington, D.C.: The Imperial Grand Council of the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, 1914), 8.

<sup>40</sup> “Shriners Reject Alleged.”

<sup>41</sup> “Negro Shrine Leader.” On African-American (Prince Hall) Masons, see Loretta Williams, *Black Freemasonry and Middle-Class Realities* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Corey D.B. Walker, *A Noble Fight: African American freemasonry and the struggle for democracy in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

first significant Islamic-identity movement among African Americans. We know that the man who was leading the U.S. Ahmadi mission in the early 1920s, Muhammad Sadiq, in 1921 sent 500 letters to various U.S. Masonic lodges.<sup>42</sup> It is not clear what the direct outcome of this effort was, but there are a number of suggestive clues. First, during the early 1920s two of his most active U.S. converts, the white J. L. Mott (Abdullah Din Muhammad) and the black P. Nathaniel Johnson (Ahmad Din)—both of whom were given the title of “sheikh,” indicating special religious authority—appear to have been Masons, or at least from a related group, themselves. Mott explicitly identified himself as a Mason.<sup>43</sup> As for Johnson, in one of the Ahmadiyya magazines from that time, there is a picture of him wearing a fez, the headpiece of the Shriners.<sup>44</sup> While the fez may in fact be reflecting the North African heritage that Johnson claimed,<sup>45</sup> it is noteworthy that in Johnson’s own break-off group, called the Fahamme Temples of Islam and Culture, the fez was a common headpiece for male members (and one member wore what was clearly a Shriner fez)<sup>46</sup> and the teachings explicitly stated: “We are the true SHRINERS.”<sup>47</sup> Also, an African-American follower of Johnson during the latter’s Ahmadi period, Wali Akram, had an interest in Masonry and Shrinedom as well, and he would eventually become an

---

<sup>42</sup> *Moslem Sunrise*, 1 (October 1921): 37.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 (July 1922): 111.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 (April 1924): 68.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson claimed that his father was of an “Arab-Spanish mixture,” thus probably from North Africa, a place with a long tradition of fez wearing. See Sheikh Ahmad Din, “From a Moslem,” *Chicago Defender*, June 4, 1927, A2.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Johnson, *Holy Fahamme Gospel or Divine Understanding* ([St. Louis]: Fahamme Temples of Islam and Culture, 1943), 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

important leader in early African-American Sunni Islam.<sup>48</sup> In addition, Robert Dannin claims that Sadiq’s “most successful recruiting occurred in the lodge hall”;<sup>49</sup> and while Dannin cites nothing to support this assertion, it is interesting to note that in a picture of some Ahmadis from the early 1930s, most of the African-American males in it are wearing fezzes.<sup>50</sup> And, beyond the Ahmadi connections, there is some evidence to indicate that many other U.S. Masons saw their religion (i.e., Masonry-tinged Christianity) as very similar to Islam.<sup>51</sup>

But the most significant piece of evidence can be found in the May 1922 issue of the Ahmadi monthly published in England.<sup>52</sup> In it, a list of recent donors is listed; among them is a “Mr. C. R. Blake” from, simply, “Charlotte.”<sup>53</sup> Blake, who in official documents went by Caesar R. Blake, Jr., was based out of Charlotte, North Carolina. If this donor to the Ahmadis is indeed Blake, it is notable that out of the seventeen donors noted in that issue, “Mr. C. R. Blake” is the only one whose listing gives any sign of a possible U.S. connection,<sup>54</sup> which may indicate either

---

<sup>48</sup> Dannin, 37, 92.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>50</sup> Turner, 125.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Lutheran missionaries noted this in 1932 while, interestingly, reporting on the rise in the popularity of Islam among African Americans. The missionaries, however, did not explicate whether the Masons they were referring to were African-American, white, or all Masons in general. They also did not explain how exactly the Masons’ view of Islam related to African-American conversions. See “Islam in America,” *Lutheran Witness* 51 (1932): 104. Also, as Dannin points out, Dawud Ghani, one of the main figures in perhaps the longest-lasting African-American Islamic village, had once been not only an Ahmadi, but also a Prince Hall Mason. Robert Dannin, “The Greatest Migration,” in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, eds., *Muslim Minorities in the West* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2002), 64.

<sup>52</sup> This was the *Islamic Review*. Sadiq, the U.S. Ahmadi missionary at the time, began his own Ahmadi periodical called the *Moslem Sunrise*. Apparently both were read in the U.S.

<sup>53</sup> *Islamic Review* 10 (May 1922): 238.

<sup>54</sup> In fact, U.S. Americans very rarely were noted in the early years of the *Islamic Review*.

that Blake, personally, was seriously interested in Islam or, more significantly, that Islam may have been disproportionately attractive to African-American Shriners *in general*. Nonetheless, Blake's response to Suleiman's proposal, and the fact that we have little other evidence to confirm a link with African-American Shriners, suggest that this was perhaps only a short-lived attraction.

Still, though, Blake did not publically dismiss Suleiman's claim of representing Islamic Masonry. By the 1920s, Freemasonry had existed in Muslim-majority lands for close to 200 years. European Mason merchants, diplomats, and, later, colonizers were responsible for importing the Craft.<sup>55</sup> Originally they did not intend to allow in non-Europeans or non-Christians, but soon local elites (largely because they could afford to pay the requisite dues) began joining, desiring to access the modern sociability and social networking offered by the fraternities. Several lodges began to be formed with a large number of Muslims, and the Qur'an replaced the Bible as the holy book used in the Muslim lodges' ceremonies. This was followed, particularly in the Ottoman regions, by local Muslim Masonic brothers—in the tradition of many modern Freemasons throughout the world—reinterpreting the Masonic genealogical myths in ways that would affirm the importance of their own religion. A variety of narratives were produced that placed Islam and Islamic figures at the heart of the tradition.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Paul Dumont, "Freemasonry in Turkey," *European Review* 13, (2005): 481-82.

<sup>56</sup> The most thorough survey to date of Masonry in Muslim-majority lands (which also contains an extensive bibliography) is Thierry Zarcone, *Mystiques, Philosophes et Francs-Maçons en Islam* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes d'Istanbul, 1993).

As for Suleiman's Masonic claims, a number of things should be pointed out. First and foremost, while we have become aware of the existence of numerous Masonic lodges throughout Muslim-majority lands that had been established by the early 1900s, no scholar, to my knowledge, has identified any Masonic lodge in Mecca.<sup>57</sup> Second, the story of a Qur'an written in 410 B.C. is nowhere to be found in the available literature. Third, while historians have, for at least seventy-five years, been aware of Masonry in Khartoum, Sudan,<sup>58</sup> details of the Muslim-majority lodges there have yet to be examined by scholars.<sup>59</sup> In short, we currently cannot satisfactorily vet Suleiman's assertions. Nonetheless, I should point out that after examining numerous Masonic sources and the available secondary literature, I have not yet come across any mention of a figure by the name of Abdul Hamid Suleiman (nor a Prince de Solomon<sup>60</sup>). If we

---

<sup>57</sup> However, we cannot rule out the possibility that one did exist there, particularly considering the fact that many Muslims—including, presumably, some Muslim Masons—traveled there for the annual hajj and, there, would have had ample opportunity to spread the Craft.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Freke Gould, *Gould's History of Freemasonry throughout the World* 6 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936 [1885]), IV: 232. I do not know if the reference to the Khartoum lodges was in Gould's original 1885 edition, but it's likely that it only appeared later.

<sup>59</sup> The only discussion I have found for Sudanese Masonry primarily concerns white Masons. See F.D. Stevenson Drane, "Freemasonry in Egypt (Part I)," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 81 (1968): 209-223. In this article, it is reported that British Masonry first came to the Sudan in autumn 1901 with the founding of the Khartoum Lodge, No. 2877. The leaders of this lodge, at least through 1933, were all Englishmen. Two years prior to the founding of the Khartoum Lodge, a District Grand Lodge of Egypt and the Sudan was formed, but no lodges from the Sudan were part of it at the time. Gould (see previous note) lists three lodges in Khartoum, including one with an Arabic name (Mahfal el-Ittihad, No. 3348), and given that No. 2877 is the lowest number of the three, it is reasonable to assume that it was the first of the three to be formed. Lastly, Drane informs us that the 1961 installation of Mohamed Salih El Shangiti as District Grand Master "was the first time that a D[istrict] G[rand] Master's Installation had been performed in Khartoum, and the first time that a native of the Sudan had risen to such great eminence in the Masonic world" (215).

<sup>60</sup> The name Solomon, of course, has a Masonic resonance, as one of the central figures in Masonic lore is King Solomon.

were to take his claims of his high position (“High Priest”) in the Muslim and Masonic world at face value, then it seems rather suspicious that he has evaded all scholarly observers.<sup>61</sup>

Back in the U.S.: After briefly capturing the attention of the media in August and September 1922,<sup>62</sup> other than on one occasion in 1927 (see below), we hear no more of Suleiman’s appeal to the Shriners. There are, however, continued references to his activities among other Masons. There is first of all a vague reference to Suleiman “enter[ing] into a controversy” with one James Cannon, the African-American Grand Master of New York and New Jersey of “Grand Lodge, No. 1, A.F. & A.M., Long Branch, N.J.” sometime during 1922.<sup>63</sup> Cannon had also claimed to have received his Masonic authority abroad, but for him it was in India, and that year a private investigation was made into this claim. It is unclear exactly as to what role Suleiman played in this “controversy,” but it may be related to another claim that Suleiman would make in 1927: that in 1924 he gave a deposition for a U.S. Supreme Court case, and that his testimony led to “favorable decisions for the colored Masons of Kansas, Florida and Massachusetts and in the Texas case now pending.”<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> If Suleiman were indeed an African Muslim Mason, he would not have been the first person to have been initiated into Masonry in an African lodge and then come to the U.S. In 1911, a U.S. Freemasonry journal reported that a Mason residing in Kentucky had been first initiated into the fraternity while in northern Africa. See *The American Tyler-Keystone* 25 (1911): 474.

<sup>62</sup> I have found six newspaper articles from the late summer of 1922 which discuss Suleiman.

<sup>63</sup> Harold Van Buren Voorhis, *Negro Masonry in the United States* ([Kila, MT]: Kessinger Publishing, 1995), 51.

<sup>64</sup> “Egyptian Ex-High.” In Suleiman’s 1922 appearance at the African-American Masonic convention, he apparently signed “two dispositions for cases instituted, one in Texas and one in Little Rock, Ark., and is the only Arabian in the [US] to come to the defense of our Shriners.” See “Sheriff of Mecca.”

This claim was accompanied by his new announcement that the Shriner systems of both whites and African Americans were illegitimate. Now residing at 2139 7<sup>th</sup> Ave.<sup>65</sup> and going as “Dr. Abdull Hamid Sulyman,”<sup>66</sup> he was reiterating his 1922 assertions about the true Shriner system only being the one out of Mecca, and its requirement of converting to Islam. Suleiman even went as far as publishing a letter from the Grand Lodge in England to prove that all Prince Hall masonry was illegitimate.

Suleiman appears to have disappeared from press reports between the autumns of 1923 and 1927. The 1927 article in which he discusses the Masonic court cases and the Grand Lodge letter is the first we hear of him after a few years, and, soon after, he is at odds with the law. In December, while still residing at 2139 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. in New York, Suleiman was working as a professional fortune teller, an “Egyptian occultist,” and had been accused by a client of swindling money from her.<sup>67</sup> Suleiman had been claiming mystical powers since the time of his original appearance in the press, saying that he had “qualified as a professor of mystic and occult sciences in a university under the auspices of the Mohammedan faith in Khartum.”<sup>68</sup> During the 1920s, there were at least eight other black Americans advertising themselves in New York as Islam-connected spiritual advisors—with the title “Mohammedan Scientist” being most

---

<sup>65</sup> An address that he claims to have had at least since the previous May. See “Egyptian Ex-High.”

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* The picture of Suleiman in this article confirms he is the same man as the one who appeared in 1922.

<sup>67</sup> “Trusting Girl Throws \$370 after \$210 She Lost,” *Afro-American*, December 24, 1927, 1; “Jail Masonic”; Walkes, 118-119.

<sup>68</sup> “Negro Shrine Leader.”

common<sup>69</sup>—a phenomenon that appears to have peaked in 1927, perhaps due to the influence of the MST which was gaining a wide following by that period, or maybe due to direct competition with Suleiman. In any case, in 1931, when Suleiman was residing at 1864 7<sup>th</sup> Ave., similar charges were brought against him again.<sup>70</sup> For both the charges, he plead not guilty. The only other time we hear about a figure who was possibly Suleiman and possessed mystical powers, is in a story by Mother E. Keller, a well-known African-American spiritual religion practitioner from the period. Keller, who led the St. James Temple of Christian Faith No. 2 in New Orleans, claimed she had at one time “received training in Voodooism from a Mohammedan prince in New York.”<sup>71</sup> “Prince,” of course, is a title reminiscent of Dr. Prince de Solomon, and was also a title that the figure going by the name of Suleiman sometimes used. In fact, when in court for the 1927 charge, he claimed to be a descendent of “the ancient House of Prince Uziel.”<sup>72</sup>

The next we hear of Suleiman’s Masonic ties is in early 1928 when it was reported that he had once “won notoriety as the founder of the Oriental Branch of the Masonic Order.”<sup>73</sup> In the following year, “Prince Abdul Hamid Sulyman of Khartum, Egypt, priest of Mecca”—note the

---

<sup>69</sup> This title was used by no fewer than five individuals in the 1920s, and another claimed to teach “Mohammedan Science,” though, to my knowledge, Suleiman did not use any such reference. Two other features stand out concerning these figures: 1) None referred to “Moors”; and 2) They all seem to have been exclusively sellers of spiritual services, as opposed to promoting religious organizations. Despite this last fact, however, one of the earliest of these individuals, “Prof. J. Du Ja Ja,” who first appeared around 1923 (notably, a year after Suleiman had), did seem to promote some teachings which included in them a reference to Egypt as the land of Canaan. We can only speculate as to the possible influence of Suleiman (with his Egypt-connected, African-American-centered “Canaanites Temple”) on him, and him on Drew Ali’s African genealogy. I will discuss these “Mohammedan Scientist” figures in more depth in a future work.

<sup>70</sup> “Egyptian Seer Pleads Not Guilty to Charge,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 2, 1931, 6.

<sup>71</sup> Hans A. Baer, *The Black Spiritual Movement* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 21-22.

<sup>72</sup> Walkes, 118.

<sup>73</sup> “Jail Masonic Order Head,” *Afro-American*, January 7, 1928, 1.

use of the title “prince”—appeared as a speaker at the second annual banquet of the “Grand Orient of Ancient, Free and Accepted Scottish Rite Masons of Union Faith.” This order was said to have been founded in 1923 by a J.B. Thornton, and in 1929 claimed to have 800 members in New York and 15,000 nationally.<sup>74</sup> It should be pointed out too that it is not clear whether (1) the two groups referred to in 1928 and 1929 were the same, (2) they were related to his Islamic missionary work in 1923, and (3) they were African-American or white Masonic orders, or mixed. It is notable, however, that one of the past masters of the latter order (the “Grand Orient of Ancient...”) who was making a speech at the banquet was “Rabbi A.J. Ford,” presumably Arnold J. Ford.<sup>75</sup> In the early 1920s, Ford had in fact led two different Black Hebrew movements which incorporated Islamic themes and practices, the Moorish Zionist Temple and Beth B’nai Abraham.<sup>76</sup> The connections between Ford’s group and Suleiman—let alone Drew Ali’s MST—remain obscure.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> “Scottish Rite Masons Give Annual Banquet,” *New York Amsterdam News*, February 27, 1929, 7.

<sup>75</sup> I have found no New York incorporation records for this group, but I have found some from the year 1926 for “The Grand United Masonic Orient Inc.,” in which “Arnold J. Ford” of 117 W. 142<sup>nd</sup> St. is listed as an incorporator. There is no clear connection to Suleiman/de Solomon in this record.

<sup>76</sup> Allen, 173, 202 n.41.

<sup>77</sup> On Ford and the history of the various African-American Moorish Jewish groups, see Ruth Landes, “Negro Jews in Harlem,” *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 9 (1967): 175-189 and James E. Landing, *Black Judaism* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), chapter 5, 119-157. Landing assumes that the Moorish identity was borrowed from the MST, but we have direct evidence that these Jewish groups were started in 1925 at the latest (and possibly as early as 1921), which precedes any direct evidence we have concerning Drew Ali’s use of a Moorish identity. It is possible that Drew Ali had in fact borrowed elements of his African genealogical narrative from Ford’s. Other evidence suggesting that Drew Ali was influenced by the Moorish Hebrews was the importance he gave to Marcus Garvey—a feature notable among Ford’s group—and the introduction of the word “El” (along with “Bey”) as a suffix to Moors’ surnames, which is consistent with the Hebrew—and not the Islamic—tradition.

Finally, in 1934 an “A.H. Sulyman” is listed as an officer and past master of the Atma Lodge A.F. & O.M.<sup>78</sup> This lodge, in cooperation with Mecca Chapter O.E.S.,<sup>79</sup> “unveiled and dedicated a memorial monument at Beverly Hill cemetery ... in New York on Decoration day before a crowd estimated at 300.”<sup>80</sup> Here again, the relationships of these particular lodges to the other groups discussed in this article are unknown. After this appearance, we hear nothing more of Suleiman.

### ***Suleiman’s Islamic Movement***

Whatever Suleiman’s Masonic ties were, in 1923, at least, he was leading the conversion to Islam movement in Newark described in the introduction of this article. At the time, New Jersey was attracting both Muslim immigrants and African Americans.<sup>81</sup> In fact, during World War I, more African Americans settled there than in any other northeastern state, and between 1900 and 1930 its black population tripled (from 69,844 to 208,828), with Newark in particular going from 6,694 to 38,880 in the same time period. Those who came were largely from the rural South, therefore New Jersey exposed them to many new experiences. For the first time they were living

---

<sup>78</sup> I have found no records for this group. The word Atma, however, was commonly referred to in Theosophy, which suggests that the group was shaped around Theosophy teachings.

<sup>79</sup> O.E.S. stands for Order of the Eastern Star. This was a Masonry-connected group established in the later 1800s, and was notable for allowing in women. While the group was popularly known as a Christian organization, I have found no other references to a Mecca Chapter. It might also be noted that the “Oriental Grand Chapter” of the O.E.S. was incorporated in New York in 1916 with one Lulu Cross Williams listed as an incorporator—perhaps the same Lulu who had been married to de Solomon?

<sup>80</sup> “Atma Masonic Lodge Unveils Monument,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 7, 1934, 16; “Masons and Stars Unveil Monument,” *Chicago Defender*, June 9, 1934, 3.

<sup>81</sup> See Barbara Cunningham, ed., *The New Jersey Ethnic Experience* (Union City, NJ: Wm. H. Wise & Co., 1977).

in a densely-populated black community; they were introduced to the relatively cosmopolitan culture of a northeastern city, which was attracting many immigrants from throughout the world (including many Muslims); and the new black residents had to now deal with the *urban* racism and dismal living conditions that plagued the state. The combination of all these factors produced an incredible cultural and religious florescence.<sup>82</sup> The conditions, then, were ripe for new religious movements to catch on.<sup>83</sup>

Let us start here by recalling the facts presented at the beginning of this article. (A) In mid-1923 an Abdul Hamid Suleiman was heading a conversion to Islam group among African Americans. (B) Suleiman had been leading a number of New York City Muslims—presumably, Muslim immigrants. (C) Suleiman’s group was attempting to “win Negroes to their Mohammedan faith by stressing the fact of the absolute equality of races and genuine brotherhood under Mohammedanism, as in opposition to the well-known attitude of white Christians.”<sup>84</sup> (D) A mosque for the group had been started in Newark, and while the articles suggested they had other mosques, no other cities for these mosques were explicitly identified. (E) The movement plans to move to the South to spread the teachings to more African Americans.

Beyond these facts, there are a few others that have not yet been mentioned. (F) Suleiman and the Muslims aligned with him announced in July that they had plans to build a

---

<sup>82</sup> Lee Hagan, Larry A. Greene, Leonard Harris, and Clement A. Price, “Blacks,” in *The New Jersey Ethnic Experience*, Barbara Cunningham, ed. (Union City, NJ: Wm. H. Wise & Co., 1977), 77-79.

<sup>83</sup> We know that, later, during the late 1920s, Newark was one of the main centers for the MST. See *Moorish Guide*, September 14, 1928 to March 1, 1929.

<sup>84</sup> “N.Y. to Have.”

mosque in New York, in “the northern part of Manhattan Island” (Harlem?).<sup>85</sup> (G) During this period, Suleiman used the title of “Dr.”<sup>86</sup>—again, similar to Dr. Prince de Solomon. (H) In July 1923, Suleiman was still residing at 143 W. 130<sup>th</sup> St., the same address where he lived the previous autumn while reaching out to the Shriners.<sup>87</sup> (I) There was “a large membership” in the movement, and “[a] number of Moslem groups [had] been started.”<sup>88</sup> (J) “Groups of negro Moslems [had] combined with the Turkish and Syrian groups throughout the United States.”<sup>89</sup> Suleiman explained that “he is bringing into closer religious harmony the Negro, Turkish and Syrian Moslems.”<sup>90</sup> (K) Suleiman’s mosque in Newark—which was the most prominent of his groups—has its “revival meeting[s]” at a hall at the corner of Bank St. and Rutgers St.<sup>91</sup> This group was described as a “colored cult,” and there is no mention of non-black members.<sup>92</sup> (L) Suleiman was loved by his followers: Upon his release on bail in August 1923 (see below), over one hundred African Americans crowded outside the local police headquarters to see him leave the jail. Upon his emergence, Suleiman raised his hat to acknowledge the crowd—an act which elicited cheers. Amidst the exultation, two young women approached and kissed the purportedly seventy-seven-year-old man; then the crowd formed a procession leading Suleiman away. Also,

---

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*; “Converts Sought by Mohammedans,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 15, 1923, A13.

<sup>86</sup> “New Jersey.”

<sup>87</sup> “Converts Sought.”

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> “Mahometans Will Try to Convert Negroes,” *New York Age*, July 21, 1923, 1.

<sup>91</sup> “Converts Sought”; “Crowd Cheers Revivalist Released in \$2,000 Bail,” *Newark Evening News*, August 20, 1923, 8-5.

<sup>92</sup> “Priest of Cult and Another Are Held on Charges of Girl’s Father.” *Newark Evening News*, August 23, 1923, 8-3.

Suleiman posted \$2,000 for bail—it is likely that this high sum was contributed by his followers.<sup>93</sup> (M) Suleiman’s assistant was a twenty-two-year-old man named Mohammed Ali who lived at 332 Halsey St. in Newark, and had conducted meetings for the group. He was apparently far less important to the group than Suleiman, as indicated by the fact that unlike Suleiman, he was not bailed out of jail, despite being arrested at the same time.<sup>94</sup> (N) The name of Suleiman’s movement was the “Caananites Temple” [sic].<sup>95</sup>

Four other features about Suleiman’s movement should be pointed out. The first reveals what is perhaps a darker side to Suleiman’s efforts, though it should at the very least be noted that during the early twentieth century, perhaps as a conservative reaction, mysterious “Oriental” religious leaders—particularly black ones—in the U.S. were frequently accused of fraud and of manipulation of people for sexual purposes.<sup>96</sup> In 1924, the Supreme Court of New Jersey upheld the conviction of Suleiman for carnal abuse of a child. Suleiman had been found guilty of having sexual intercourse with the daughter, who was under the age of twelve at the time, of two of his followers in his “religious cult” in April 1923. The girl’s father had charged Suleiman, and he was arrested on August 19 of that year (being released on bail that day, as described above). Suleiman plead not guilty, claiming that he had been in a meeting in another city until late on the night in question. In the trial, it was said that upon the parents’ initiation into Suleiman’s group,

---

<sup>93</sup> “Crowd Cheers.”

<sup>94</sup> “Crowd Cheers.”

<sup>95</sup> “Converts Sought.” It is not certain as to whether this was the spelling the group used or a misspelling on the reporter’s part.

<sup>96</sup> Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 223-34 and Jamie J. Wilson, *Building a Healthy Black Harlem* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009), chapter 2, 31-58.

he told them that each of their three children had to be initiated separately from the parents and that Suleiman would spend nine nights in the same room as the children.<sup>97</sup> Suleiman's assistant, Mohammed Ali, was also arrested, though his role in the case is unknown. In October of that year, Suleiman was convicted. While we do not know the sentence he ended up receiving, it was reported that he was facing eighteen months in prison.<sup>98</sup> We do not hear about Suleiman in the press again until 1927, and, other than in connection to his push at that time to urge all U.S. Shriners to join his Islamic Masonry, we do not again hear about him promoting conversion to Islam.

The second feature connected to Suleiman's movement is concerning the doctrines of that movement: In short, we know almost nothing. Here are some tentative conclusions we can draw: First, we might assume that his reference to the Canaanites was used in a way similar to that which Drew Ali used it; that is, in promoting a biblically-based unique genealogy for African-Americans. Next, we do not hear of any explicit reference to Masonry/Shrinedom or mysticism in connection to the 1923 phase, but, since these were clearly part of the other phases of his life, and he connected them to Islam, it is reasonable to suspect that they at least played a role in his movement. The initiation ritual described in his court case stands out as particularly peculiar, and, if it is an accurate representation of what took place in the group, this seems to be a unique practice to Suleiman. Also, it is not known if there were indeed immigrant Muslims in his movement, or if a Qur'an was used. We also might point out that his message about Islam being

---

<sup>97</sup> *New Jersey v. Abdul Hamid Suleiman*, 126 A. 425 (1924).

<sup>98</sup> *Newark Evening News*, October 24, [1923?], 8-3.

free from racism is reminiscent of a discourse popular in Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and had also been used by the Ahmadis in the U.S. in the early 1920s.

Third, Suleiman's call for African Americans to convert to Islam caused somewhat of a reaction in the press. As noted in the introduction, the literary magazine *The Smart Set* ran a news brief about Suleiman, and a few months prior to this, in July when the story first broke, one of the magazine's editors and main contributors, the famed H.L. Mencken, wrote an article (though without explicitly mentioning Suleiman) in support of the idea, saying it would help African Americans in the South mobilize so they could defend themselves against the KKK's violent attacks.<sup>99</sup> Meanwhile, in the popular black newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, an editorial was published criticizing Suleiman's position, saying "[o]ur white people should make a change, not you [African Americans] ..."<sup>100</sup> So far, it is not known if Suleiman had an impact in the press beyond this short-lived discussion.

The final feature to point out is the fact that in all of the evidence connected to the figure of Suleiman that has been presented here—including the de Solomon information—nowhere is the name Drew Ali, or even simply a Drew,<sup>101</sup> found. This suggests that in the groups

---

<sup>99</sup> H.L. Mencken, "Venture into Therapeutics," *The Smart Set* (July 1923): 49-52. Mencken here does not mention Suleiman and suggests sending Turkish missionaries—not, notably, Arabian or East African ones, as might be expected if he was indeed familiar with Suleiman. We can only speculate, then, as to his inspiration for the proposal, though the timing of it is certainly suggestive. In a widely-reprinted article in 1926, Mencken explains that immediately after having made his proposal about Islam for African Americans, he was shown by many people why it was not a good idea, and so he retracted it. *Idem*, "A Chance for a Millionaire," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 24, 1926, F1. Interestingly, it seems an editorial writer for the black newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier*, may have misunderstood Mencken's retraction here, and supported Mencken's original position. See E.R. McKinney, "The Week," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 30, 1926, 14; McKinney is referring to a reprinting of "A Chance" found under the title "Hiring a Hall," *New York World*, January 24, 1926, [9?].

<sup>100</sup> Roscoe Simmons, "The Week," *Chicago Defender*, July 21, 1923, 13.

<sup>101</sup> Which is believed to be the surname Drew Ali had used since his birth.

that Suleiman was involved with in the early 1920s, and perhaps even in the 1910s, *he*, not Drew Ali, was the leader. Could it be that Drew Ali—whose movement, as we will see, shared many similarities with Suleiman’s—was in fact influenced by Suleiman? We shall now turn to the MST-connected evidence to explore that possibility.

## **Part II: Suleiman and Noble Drew Ali**

### ***Drew Ali and the Newark era***

One of the biggest difficulties in assessing the possible influence of Suleiman on Drew Ali is the fact that there are numerous unconfirmed and sometimes conflicting stories about Drew Ali prior to November 1926, when he incorporated his Moorish Temple of Science in Chicago.<sup>102</sup> So far, there has been no evidence produced to confirm any of Drew Ali’s activities prior to this date, or at least prior to 1925.<sup>103</sup> His earliest known appearance in the press is in an advertisement in May 1927, and it really is only in late 1927 that his activities started drawing the press’s

---

<sup>102</sup> I am basing this date off the incorporation document for the Moorish Temple of Science (at 3603 Indiana Ave., the location that would later be known as the “Home Office”) that is noted in the group’s FBI file (Newark 100-14714) and can be found online at <http://moorishworld.tripod.com/id13.html>. It should be mentioned that none of Drew Ali’s fellow incorporators on the 1926 form use the surname additions of “El” or “Bey,” which were almost universal in the MST by 1928, suggesting that in 1926 the group was still in an early stage of development—thus more evidence that Drew Ali’s movement was relatively new by that time.

<sup>103</sup> At least one known photograph of Drew Ali—the one in which he is standing while wearing, notably, a feathered turban and a decorated sash that has “ISLAM” embroidered at the bottom—has the year 1925 written on it, but it is not known if that was the date the photograph was taken, or if it was put on there simply to indicate the year the MST was founded. One reason to suspect that this “1925” was put on at a later date is that along with the date is written the following: “Prophet Noble Drew Ali. Founder of Moorish Science Temple of America”—this title, MSTA, does not appear on MST documents prior to 1928, and early MST writings, as well as the 1926 incorporation form, indicate that what was established in 1925-26 was the “Moorish Temple of Science,” not the MSTA. For those interested in pursuing the origins of this photograph: The photographer’s name written on the picture is R.D. Jones. The photograph of Drew Ali in which he is sitting in a chair while wearing the same outfit noted above appears to have the same photographer’s name (R.D. Jones) inscribed in the bottom right-hand corner, and was likely taken in the same session as the other picture.

attention.<sup>104</sup> Yet almost all<sup>105</sup> of the legends concerning the history of Drew Ali's religious work insist that he first began his movement in Newark in 1913, and most say that this early group went by the name of "The Canaanite Temple." Beyond these basic elements, however, accounts vary. What follows are summaries of some of the most well-known narratives passed along in MST traditions concerning Drew Ali's life between 1913 and 1926.

1. After establishing his Canaanite Temple in 1913, in 1918 Drew Ali faced competition from an unnamed "Arab immigrant" who "appeared in Newark and professed orthodox Islam among African Americans. His efforts interfered with Noble Drew Ali's work, and a conflict resulted in the breakup of his first temple." Because of this, Ali relocated to Chicago and established a temple there in 1919, focusing more on African-American unity and had a desire to "embrace the ritual of 'black' culture" for political unity.<sup>106</sup>

2. "In 1912 or 1913, aged 27, in Newark... [Drew Ali] had a dream in which he was ordered to found a religion 'for the uplifting of fallen mankind' and especially for the 'Lost-found nation' of American blacks." 1916 is "sometimes mentioned" as the first publication of Ali's *Holy Koran*. "When...Drew Ali left Newark for Chicago in 1925 he gave as his reason the opinion that the Midwest was 'closer to Islam.' He might have been referring to the 'Egyptian' Shriners [the

---

<sup>104</sup> See Susan Nance, "Respectability and Representation: The Moorish Science Temple, Morocco, and Black Public Culture in 1920s Chicago," *American Quarterly* 54 (2002), 627-628.

<sup>105</sup> It is interesting that in the extant editions of the *Moorish Guide*, the MST newspaper produced during 1928 and 1929, there is no mention of a Canaanite Temple nor of any date prior to 1925, when, we are told, the MST was "organized." See "Moorish Leader's Historical Message to America," *Moorish Guide*, September 28, 1928, 2.

<sup>106</sup> Dannin, 26, 28.

AEAONMS]—but he also might have meant the [Ben] Ishmaels [a purported family of Muslims thought to have lived nearby]—or both. An Ishmael woman...passed down a tradition that Ishmaelites were among Drew Ali's first converts in that area...Other reasons are given for the move to Chicago: that the Moors were persecuted for refusing conscription during World War I; or that Drew Ali was discomfited by the appearance of a Russo-Syrian peddler of silks and raincoats named Abdul Wali Farrad Mohammed Ali, who began to lure some of the Moors away to his own brand of Islam, closer to the Arabic model but apparently tainted with race-hatred (the white man as 'blue-eyed devil'). This may or may not be the same Wallace Fard who later (according to Moorish legend) convinced Elijah Muhammad to leave Moorish Science and to set up his own Nation of Islam."<sup>107</sup>

3. Within a decade of establishing the first Moorish community in Newark in 1913 (originally called the Canaanite Temple), Drew Ali had "an estimated membership of 30,000, [with]... temples in Detroit, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Lansing, Cleveland, Youngstown (Ohio), Charleston (West Virginia), Richmond, Petersburg (Virginia), Pine Bluff (Arkansas), and Baltimore. ... In 1914, Ali's leadership was unsuccessfully challenged in Newark by Abdul Wali Farad Muhammad Ali, a mysterious teacher of Islam from the East. Little is known about that man and the early years of his Newark mission. Two years later [1916], factionalism ... culminated as one faction stayed in Newark and named itself 'Holy

---

<sup>107</sup> Wilson, 16, 31.

Moabite Temple of the World.’ In 1923 Drew Ali moved to Chicago, where he set up the permanent headquarters of his movement, naming it the Moorish Holy Temple of Science.”<sup>108</sup>

4. Drew Ali did not establish the “very first temple” for Moors; this was “the Canaanite temple... founded by one Emir Krim El. He was a Moroccan Chief who fought against the Spanish and French in 1921-23; and...a doctor Solomon Mohammed is its co-founder.” [This author also implies that Krim El “anointed” Drew Ali.] In 1913 when Drew Ali began his “Divine Mission,” his life was in the midst of a period in which he became a Mason and had begun “to discover some of the more Ancient Sciences and grand discovery of the man of the hour,” as well as having developed his thought, “studying by night and by day... the past, present and future, to find a healing process for a sick and down trodden people throughout the whole Earthland.” “In the State of Newark, New Jersey (New Jerusalem), here in this state a covenant was made being Noble Timothy Drew. And also here he met others who would further his Islamic education although he had previously visited Egypt, and there he learned many things there in the East. To heighten what he was to gain wasn’t given unto him until late 1924 while traveling in the south.... He would by [August] 1925 openly declare his Prophethood” in Chicago when he began preaching, standing on a box in a vacant lot, using telepathy and spiritual insight to learn correct lotto numbers in order to pique the interest of a future follower.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Turner, 92.

<sup>109</sup> Ra Saadi El, *I am Your Prophet* (Atlanta: Saadi El Publications, 2008), 21-22, 26-33, 53. I have not been able to identify either a Dr. Solomon Mohammed or Emir Krim El. The latter name is likely a MST-reconstruction of Abd El Krim (Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi), the Moroccan who did indeed lead a coalition against French and Spanish colonizers in the early 1920s. The former name, however, may have something to do with the Dr. Prince de Solomon mentioned above.

5. “The Ancient Canaanite Temple” was established by Drew Ali in Newark in 1913. “Ali became the first Moslem authorized by the Caliph of Egypt and the Sultan of the Holy City of Mecca in Saudi Arabia to teach the ‘Old Time Religion’ in the West. When presenting these authorizations to New Jersey Governor, Woodrow Wilson, he was promised all the support he could muster in the United States. President Elect W. Wilson, a high Mason and member of the Illuminati, recognized the work placed upon Drew Ali for his People as ‘Putting a pair of pants on a mule.’ The above building [pictured in the text] became the rebirth place of Islamism in the Americas... Drew Ali, who also worked as a Porter on the B & O Railroad, began his teachings of law and history in the 1<sup>st</sup> floor Barber Shop shown at the corner of the building. R. Dixon El, the Owner, became His first Adept and often taught when the Prophet was on the road. 12 Moorish Men became the founding Sheiks of the Temple and later brought their women and children to the meetings. The temple grew rapidly and was moved upstairs to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. The late J.A. Rogers of Helga Rogers Publications was also one of Ali’s Students [sic] and wrote about the sciences he learned in his surreptitious biography of Drew Ali called ‘From Superman to Man.’<sup>110</sup> Drew Ali later changed the name of his institution of higher learning to The Moorish Holy Temple of Science before he was forced to make changes and moved the entire sacred

---

<sup>110</sup> J.A. Rogers did in fact show in several writings an interest in Islam, particularly in the figure of Bilal, an emancipated black slave who was one of the earliest Muslims and is traditionally recognized as being the first person to perform the Islamic call to prayer. However, in his *From “Superman” to Man* (originally published in 1917), while Rogers does comment that Islam promotes racial equality, he does not wholly endorse the religion: Islam, in his opinion—he had encountered international Islam through travel and gives no indication that he was aware of any U.S. movement—still has “pretensions” and many “faults” (J.A. Rogers, *From “Superman” to Man* (New York: Joel A. Rogers, 1965), 115). The main character in that book, notably, is a Pullman porter named Dixon.

school of nationality and divine creed to Chicago, Illinois.” The changes made had to do with the Moors not understanding Drew Ali’s teaching them that they could be “Conscious Objectors” [sic] and not have to be drafted into the military.<sup>111</sup>

6. The Canaanite Temple was established in Newark by Drew Ali in 1913 with the help of one “Dr. Suliman,” and there were “immediate” leadership challenges and a split in 1916. In 1925 Drew Ali and his followers went to Chicago.<sup>112</sup>

As has been noted, all of the above narratives emphasize a Newark base and 1913, and most mention a Canaanite Temple. While no outside sources have yet been produced for the public to confirm Drew Ali’s connection to the 1913 date, or in fact to any date prior to 1926, among the documents collected by the FBI in their investigation of the MST in the 1940s is a business card that reads (in part) as follows:

7. “Prof. Drew / The Egyptian Adept Student / 181 Warren St. Newark, NJ / I am a Moslem / Professor Drew is a man who was born with Divine Power. He was taught the Adepts of Egypt. I have the secret of destroying the germs of tuberculosis and cancer of the lungs in 10 to 30 days. [Illegible]...also give Divine Instructions and Interpretations of the Bible from genesis to

---

<sup>111</sup> Sheik Elihu N. Pleasant-Bey, *Noble Drew Ali: The Exhuming of a Nation* 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven-adept ed. ([S.l.]: Moorish American Sovereign, [2009?]), 468, 471.

<sup>112</sup> McCloud, 10-11. “Dr. Suliman” is also mentioned in the narratives given by Turner and Gomez, neither of whom cite their source for it. It appears, then, that both are relying on McCloud who was the first academic, to my knowledge, to mention the name of “Dr. Suliman.”

revelations. Also have 18 years of Christ life that is silent to your Holy Bible for all those who desire to know more about Jesus the Christ.”<sup>113</sup>

This card seems to confirm Drew Ali’s Newark roots as well as a number of features that would appear in connection with Ali in the post-1926 era. First, and perhaps most important, the Drew here identifies himself as a Muslim. Second, the reference to Jesus’ “lost years” was a significant feature of his *Holy Koran* that would appear in 1927, and was largely adapted from Levi Dowling’s *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*. Third, “Divine Power” and healing are features consistent with what we know Drew Ali promoted about himself and his movement in the Chicago years. Fourth, references to Egypt and an “Adept” are frequent in the MST of the late 1920s.<sup>114</sup> Next, the use of the name Drew is consistent with the various names (most usually, Timothy Drew) associated with Noble Drew Ali. And finally, the card has a picture of a man who looks very much like the Drew Ali seen in several photographs.

There are, however, a few features of this card that are not consistent with post-1926 Drew Ali. First, there is no mention of Moors or the uplift of African Americans, both fundamental pieces in Noble Drew Ali’s identity in the Chicago era. Along with this, the man in the card is not wearing a fez or any head piece whatsoever, whereas Noble Drew Ali is always depicted wearing a fez or turban. The fez, of course, could also be associated with the Shriners, and this card lacks reference to any Shriner or Masonic symbolism or message, which were

---

<sup>113</sup> The copy in the FBI file (Roll 3) is almost completely illegible. A slightly more readable copy is being circulated by Moorish Americans today.

<sup>114</sup> Full members of the MST were called adepts.

common in Drew Ali's MST. Lastly, the titles used—"Professor" and "Egyptian Adept Student"—are, save for a single document reportedly written by "Professor Drew, The Egyptian Adept"<sup>115</sup>—non-existent in the Chicago-era material. This card, then, suggests, and not inconsistently with a number of the Newark-era stories, that Drew Ali had at one time been claiming divine power and knowledge, as well as promoting oriental esoteric religiosity, all prior to having fully developed his Chicago-era identity. He may have changed his teachings at some point, gaining a Shriner/Masonic and Moorish identity, and downplaying the Egyptian connection and the title of professor. Finally, no mention is made of a Canaanite Temple.

### ***Connections between Drew Ali and Suleiman***

A number of elements circumstantially connect Drew Ali to Suleiman, beyond the facts that they were both black men promoting Islam to African Americans in the U.S. in the 1920s. First, most obviously, is the claim that they both led movements known as the Canaanite Temple, and both of their Temples appear to have been primarily based out of Newark (fact N). I have found no evidence of there ever being any other group in the U.S. to have used the name "Canaanite Temple" (or related spellings); therefore, this is probably the single most important connection we have. Unfortunately, we are not given an address for Drew Ali's Canaanite Temple—all we have is the information about the barbershop (number 5) and the 181 Warren St. address connected to Drew Ali's "Egyptian Adept" phase (number 7), neither of which clearly corresponds to the Bank St. and Rutgers St. intersection that we have for Suleiman's group (fact

---

<sup>115</sup> Entitled "The Industrious Acts of the Moslems," circulated by today's Moorish Americans.

K). Ultimately, then, we cannot say *with certainty* whether Drew Ali had in fact started the Canaanite Temple himself, formed his own break-off group, had simply replaced Suleiman as the head of the movement, or even whether he had truly been involved with *any* Canaanite Temple. Also, it should be pointed out that the use of “temple” in the name of this group superficially connects it to the Shriners, as they used the word to name their meeting places; it also, perhaps not coincidentally, connects the group with the Mecca Medina Temple as well as the MST and later the NOI, which was originally known as the Allah Temple of Islam<sup>116</sup>—all of which suggests a fundamental Shriner connection, and Suleiman is currently the strongest link we have between the Christian Shriners and the Muslim Shriner-inspired groups.

The second obvious tie is that there are several names and titles of figures in the various stories that also appear in the evidence connected to Suleiman, particularly the story (number 6) of a “Dr. Suliman” who helped Drew Ali establish a Canaanite Temple in Newark in 1913. First of all, Suleiman’s name was spelled on occasion “Sulyman,” and even as “Suliman” in at least one news article in 1923.<sup>117</sup> Next, we do indeed know that while he was leading his Islamic movement, Suleiman used the title “Dr.” (fact G). In fact, he *often* used that title after 1927 while acting as a Masonic leader and mystic, and, if Suleiman was indeed the same person as de Solomon, then he would have been using that title as early as 1909. The possibility that “Dr. Suliman” is the same person as both Suleiman and de Solomon is further supported by two

---

<sup>116</sup> Interestingly, “Allah Temple” was also the name of two Shriner lodges: one in the white group and one in the African-American group. The NOI, moreover, made use of Shriner and Masonic discourse. See Patrick D. Bowen, “Islam and ‘Scientific Religion’ in the United States before 1935,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22 (2011): 325-26.

<sup>117</sup> “Priest of Cult.”

things: I) The MST legend of a “doctor Solomon” (number 4) who co-founded the Canaanite Temple; and II) The fact that the name/title “Prince” was used by both the post-1926 Suleiman and de Solomon, which increases the likelihood that they were the same person. Also, in addition to Suleiman using the title of “Dr.,” in his mystical persona he used the title “Professor”; acting as a Muslim mystic with Egyptian connection and using the title of “Professor” are traits that he shared with Drew Ali (number 7), which suggests that the two men had similar inspirations or doctrines—or at the very least were coming out of the same Northeastern cultural milieu that produced the several “Mohammedan Scientists.” How all this fits together with stories of Drew Ali’s competition from an immigrant Muslim (numbers 1 through 3), as well as with the vague reference to “others who would further his Islamic education” (number 4), is unknown, but may be explained by another name that is found in both the MST- and Suleiman-connected evidence: Ali.

First we have a man named Mohammed Ali, Suleiman’s young assistant who leads meetings in Newark, and is apparently much less loved by the group (fact M). However, despite his lower status in the followers’ eyes and despite him not being bailed out of jail along with Suleiman, we do not hear about him receiving a conviction in connection to the carnal abuse charge. Perhaps this Ali figure was Drew Ali himself; if Suleiman’s group dissipated after losing its head figure due to his imprisonment, Drew Ali, who would have been a second-tier leader *under* Suleiman (in contrast to what the MST legends claim), might have been able to revive the group by promoting a new Moorish-based revelation. But the name Mohammed Ali connects also to the figure of Abdul Wali Farrad Mohammed Ali (numbers 2 and 3), who, some have

suspected, was Wallace Fard, the founder of the NOI. This immigrant Muslim Mohammed Ali has been accused of leading an Islamic group which competed with the Canaanite Temple, and it is said that his activities lead to divisions or at least a diminishing membership in the Canaanite Temple which forced Drew Ali to move to Chicago. While our current evidence cannot give us any satisfactory conclusions, it can at least be said that the main fact weakening the theory that Mohammed Ali was Fard is that the reports about Suleiman's Newark group indicate that all members were "colored" (fact K), and Fard has usually been regarded, because of his facial features and skin-tone, as someone who did not appear "black."

There is one more possible connection with the name Mohammed Ali: In 1930 a newspaper report explained that a Tunisian (i.e., a North African, a "Moor") named Mohammed Ali claimed to have been laboring for his religion in New York and Detroit since the 1890s, though he did not "describe himself as a minister or a spiritual leader."<sup>118</sup> We do not know his

---

<sup>118</sup> "Actress Returns as Moslem Wife," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 19, 1930, 9.

precise religious commitments, as there are a number of peculiar facts in the news article,<sup>119</sup> though he possibly had an MST affiliation by the time of the interview.<sup>120</sup> Also, in 1924 (an important but undocumented year in the Caananites/Canaanite Temple timeline), he had married an African-American woman, the actress Fanny Wise, who converted to Islam and helped in his proselytization efforts. The two were set to leave for Cairo. While there is a major age difference between this man and the reported age of the Newark figure by the same name, he clearly has several things linking him to the context of Suleiman/the Canaanite Temple/MST: His apparent affiliations with a variety of Muslims across the U.S., his “Moorish” identity, his possible MST ties, his interest in Egypt, and his connection with at least one African American

---

<sup>119</sup> A notable one concerns the mosque that had been built in Detroit in the early 1920s: The standard story reported by newspapers from the time was that the Detroit mosque had been led by a collaboration of local immigrant Muslims and the Ahmadi missionary Sadiq. Most newspaper accounts report that the mosque was abandoned by the community in 1922 because Sadiq’s Ahmadi “doctrines . . . caused a split in the congregation” (see “A Moslem Mosque in Detroit, Reminder of Asia, is to be Razed,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, September 8, 1922, 4A), and it has been said that when the community found out Sadiq was an Ahmadi, they forced him to leave (Kambiz Ghaneabassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 188). The Tunisian, however, blamed the failure of the mosque on “converts from Christianity insist[ing] upon bringing in some of their ritual.” The converts were indeed most probably African-American Ahmadis, but Ali’s comments suggest that they, as individuals, were more directly responsible than the Ahmadi doctrines per se or Sadiq himself, even if their acts were seen by local Muslims as supported by Sadiq’s doctrines. (Dannin (p. 37) claims Sadiq promoted syncretism, but his citation for this claim does not support it. Sadiq did promote using esoteric religious knowledge and sometimes referred to the Bible, however, so it is possible to infer a slight syncretic position.) Is Ali, here, demonstrating a continued allegiance to Sadiq? It is an episode worth exploring further.

In addition, while the couple reportedly observed the five daily prayers (including performing wudu, religious washing), according to the reporter, who may have mis-reported this, Allah—not Muhammad—“is the last greatest prophet.” Interestingly, Wallace Fard, the founder of the NOI, reportedly later claimed to be both a prophet and Allah, though this March 1930 report would be a rather early reference to that, given what we know about the timeline of the NOI. Still, while I am inclined to view this comment as the reporter’s error, we cannot rule out the possibility that this Ali was in fact involved with an Islamic sectarian group, and this may be connected to what is noted in the following footnote.

<sup>120</sup> As indicated by him and his wife wearing “the badge of the star with the crescent.” While I have not seen photographs of MST members from the 1920s wearing such a badge—and, in fact, the one badge I have been able to discern in a picture from this period is not of the star and crescent but of a seven in a circle—it is rumored to have been something early Moorish Americans wore.

during the period soon after we know Suleiman's group was active and just prior to the appearance of Drew Ali in Chicago.

Next, the mention (in numbers 3 and 4) of Drew Ali traveling south sometime between 1913 and 1925 is consistent with the description at the beginning of this article of Suleiman's group in 1923 (fact E). In fact, the precise date given in one of the stories (number 4) for Drew Ali's travel south—1924—perfectly coincides with the timeline and reports we have concerning Suleiman's "Canaanites Temple." First, in mid-1923 Suleiman's group was *planning* on traveling south (fact E); then, only a month after announcing this plan, Suleiman was arrested, then convicted and incarcerated shortly after (late 1923). These latter events most likely led to the group I) gaining criticism and possibly persecution from the local community and law enforcement, and II) either, as a result of losing what was clearly its charismatic leader, dissipating or succumbing to infighting as various members vied for leadership—all events which would have been incentives for a member, particularly if that member was himself a second-tier leader in the movement, to leave the area. If that member had ambitions of carrying on the movement, following the suggestion that the original leader had made (i.e., traveling south) would have been important in order to I) preserve the appearance of the religious authenticity of the charismatic leader, and, similarly, II) to maintain continuity in the group's history so that the new leader (i.e., the member traveling south) does not appear as a rebellious innovator, but rather as a humble follower of the original leader and his message. Of course, none of this can eliminate the possibilities that this hypothetical new leader sincerely believed in

Suleiman's message, or that Suleiman had, while still acting as the movement's head, succeeded in sending a missionary group to the South.

Similarities come up again when we compare Suleiman's and Drew Ali's messages and symbols used. As has been noted, both men relied on stories of personal connections with and religious authority derived from Egypt and Mecca. Both men employed Masonic and Shriner symbolism<sup>121</sup> and costume, and references to general oriental esoteric knowledge (which was often connected to Masonry at the time).<sup>122</sup> The two men also claimed to have mystical powers,

---

<sup>121</sup> Beginning in October 1928, the masthead of Drew Ali's newspaper, the *Moorish Guide*, was changed. It now included several symbols between the two words of the newspaper's title. First were the symbols common to many MST documents: the clasped hands and the crescent and star. The crescent and star, as has been noted, were used by the Shriners. In addition to these symbols, in the masthead were also two pyramids, a camel, and a partial square. The square is a well-known Masonic symbol, as are pyramids. While the Shriners used pyramids and camels on their documents, it is at least noteworthy that Suleiman's "patent" for his credentials as High Priest (described above) also made use of images of pyramids and camels.

The number seven may be important as well. The Masons, perennial friends of numerology, valued the number seven, as have many other numerology-inclined religionists. Seven, furthermore, was the most important number in the MST, and it adorned the cover of many copies of Drew Ali's *Holy Koran*. But it is also interesting that the ages given for de Solomon—who, in my opinion, was probably the same person as Suleiman—would have put him in his fifties in 1922, yet throughout *both* 1922 and 1923 Suleiman claimed to be *seventy-seven* years old. We do know that in 1927 he was said to be eighty-two, but that does not discount the possibility that when he was likely trying to start his own movements (i.e., 1922-23) he intentionally claimed to be an age which would have symbolic importance for those interested in Masonry and esotericism, particularly if he himself, like Drew Ali would later, emphasized the number seven in particular.

<sup>122</sup> For other Masonic/Shriner symbols used by the MST, see Robert L. Uzzel, "The Moorish Science Temple: A Religion Influenced by Freemasonry," *Chater-Cosmos Transactions* 8 (1985): 65-82. Uzzel points out that not all contemporary Moorish Americans accept the idea that Drew Ali was influenced by Freemasonry. While Uzzel also notes that there is Masonic symbolism in Drew Ali's *Holy Koran*, he does not seem to be aware that the passages he cites were actually originally published in a different book, Dowling's *Aquarian Gospel*, and that Drew Ali's book in fact was largely composed of uncredited excerpts from the *Aquarian Gospel*. Dowling had been significantly influenced by Theosophy, which, as a movement, also promoted interest in Freemasonry. The use of Masonic elements in the MST, then, does not necessarily reflect a direct influence of the Craft, but more a general fascination with the esoteric discourse that was popular at the time. There is evidence (which I will discuss in a future work) that African Americans of that era were much more interested in esotericism than has previously been appreciated. The *Aquarian Gospel*-Masonry connection would also further support a theory that I will propose below that Drew Ali was himself—independently—interested in exploring esotericism, and that by using materials culled from the world of Theosophy and Rosicrucians he created his own, unique doctrines.

and found people who believed these claims. Even more importantly, however, particularly given its rarity, is the reference to a Canaanite Temple. By having Canaanite in the name of the movement, suggests that Canaanite was a fundamental identity for the members, and thus corresponds to the Canaanite connection in Drew Ali's genealogy for African Americans. Lastly, both men promoted Islam as a religion for African Americans in that it, in their view, supported freedom from prejudice (fact C) and was one which would connect them to international Islam (facts B and J). In short, Suleiman and Drew Ali employed numerous similar themes—themes that, in fact, have not otherwise been shown to have appeared in connection with each other to that degree prior to Wallace Fard's emergence in Detroit in 1930, which led to what became the Nation of Islam—and even the NOI did not promote a Canaanite identity.

### *Differences*

Current evidence suggests that there are, of course, some glaring differences between Suleiman and Drew Ali, and the religious movements that they promoted. First, it needs to be made clear that Suleiman and Drew Ali were not the same person. A handful of pictures exist of Suleiman and Drew Ali,<sup>123</sup> and while both appear to be average-built men of African descent, their faces are clearly distinct. Suleiman appears (see Fig. 1) to have different eye, ear, nose and upper lip shapes than Drew Ali, and there has never, to my knowledge, been mention of Drew Ali having blue eyes, unlike for Suleiman. In addition, Suleiman's wearing of glasses and his facial expressions are not consistent with any pictures of the MST leader.

---

<sup>123</sup> Several photographs of Drew Ali are easily accessible through an internet search.



Fig. 1. Abdul Hamid Suleiman. See “Mecca High Priest Would Put Negro Shriners in Right,” *New York World*, September 2, 1922, 1 (left); “The Sheriff of Mecca,” *Chicago Defender*, August 26, 1922, 9, from ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Chicago Defender* (1910 - 1975) (right).

Second, the most important doctrinal difference is Drew Ali’s emphasis on the Moorish identity and its supplemental genealogy and narrative which identify the Moors as descendents of not only the biblical Canaanites—for which we have a connection with Suleiman—but also, and more important in Drew Ali’s doctrines, the Moabites, who supposedly immigrated long ago to northern Africa. The MST story also informs us that Africa’s “true and divine name” is Amexem, and it had, prior to a great earthquake, once been connected to the Americas. Ali, of course, was not the first person to identify African Americans with Moors—there had been a

long tradition of this within U.S. culture. In fact, the “black Shriners” had sometimes been referred to as “Moorish Nobles,”<sup>124</sup> and apparently even capitalized on the association in American culture of the image (in its more favorable manifestations) of the Moor with physically and sometimes morally strong, free blacks.<sup>125</sup> And, as has been mentioned, Rabbi Arnold J. Ford employed the Moorish symbol. But attempts by scholars to identify uses of the Moabite-Amexem story prior to that by Drew Ali have been in vain, and so it seems that this specific narrative was perhaps an original contribution by Drew Ali himself.<sup>126</sup> Ernest Allen, Jr. has speculated that the Amexem story was possibly an Africanizing of the Atlantis myth, and that Drew Ali may have been inspired by a well-known Theosophical text which promoted it.<sup>127</sup> Given this, and the fact that for his *Holy Koran* Drew Ali used large portions of other Theosophical- and Rosicrucian-connected texts, it appears as if Drew Ali had an independent interest in esoteric knowledge. This may have been why he eventually incorporated the Shriner/Masonic symbols and ideas into his MST, as there was certainly an interest, among late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century esoterics, in Masonry and its connection to divine knowledge. Suleiman may have legitimized this connection for Drew Ali. Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that Suleiman had already developed the Amexem story, nor can

---

<sup>124</sup> See Tubal Cain, “Chips from the Quarries,” *Afro-American*, January 3, 1903, 4.

<sup>125</sup> On the use of the Moor image by African-American Shriners, see Walkes, 120-24. On the image of the Moor in American culture, see Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 173-83; Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27-33, 293-94.

<sup>126</sup> The most helpful analysis of the sources of Drew Ali’s Moorish genealogy narrative is Allen, 163-214. On other possible sources for Drew Ali’s genealogy, see above, the notes connected to Arnold J. Ford and Theosophy.

<sup>127</sup> See Allen.

we dismiss the idea completely that he was familiar with Theosophy, as the “Atma” lodge connection suggests; but these are mere speculations.

A related issue is the emphasis Drew Ali placed on nationality. For him, the rediscovery of one’s true national identity was far more important than simply converting to Islam, which Suleiman seems to have promoted (though the Canaanite identity suggests there may be more to the nationalistic aspect of his ideology than we know). This appears to have served a number of purposes for Drew Ali. One is that by insisting that Islam was African Americans’ true, divinely-assigned religion, this helped reduce the need for debate over technical theological issues that “converts” (that is, as opposed to “reverts,” a term that would become popular with later African-American Muslims) often face, thereby reducing to one simple issue the possible objections to joining: whether one believed in Drew Ali’s claim or not. Another benefit of emphasizing nationality is that it resonated with the growing desire on a global level for political “nations” to have a free, self-determined existence; thereby co-opting the greater weight that the “nation” discourse had in secular politics as compared to religious or racial rights. There were in fact numerous other benefits of stressing nationhood, as other scholars have pointed out, but the importance here is to simply note that Drew Ali appears to have diverged from Suleiman on this key issue.

As for each man’s religious doctrines and symbols, while they shared the many general similarities described above, they were not exactly the same (at least as far as we know for Suleiman). Drew Ali’s publishing of his own *Holy Koran* is the most salient piece of evidence for this. In addition, unlike Suleiman (and unlike Elijah Muhammad later), Drew Ali did not, as

far as we know, explicitly assert that the MST was a higher form of Masonry, even if its symbols were prevalent in his system. Finally, numerous details in their doctrines and legitimization stories differ,<sup>128</sup> or at least many of Drew Ali's do not appear to be found in Suleiman's movement, even if we admittedly cannot say much about his doctrines.

There are also the issues of the dates and immigrant Muslims. In nowhere in the material on Suleiman do we have anything connecting him directly to dates prior to 1922, whereas there are numerous pre-1926 dates for Drew Ali. If we believe Suleiman may have once gone by the name of Dr. Prince de Solomon, the dates we have associated with him still do not correspond well to Drew Ali's; the only similar date is 1913, and this was when de Solomon was reportedly having legal trouble for threatening his wife—the facts of which *prima facie* have nothing to do with him starting a Canaanite Temple, as they do with Drew Ali (though, if Drew Ali was a member of de Solomon's Mecca Medina Temple, perhaps it was at this point, when de Solomon had to likely maintain a low profile, that Drew Ali began to lead a movement of his own). Also, even though Drew Ali stressed the “Asiatic” origins of African Americans and had even put in an edition of his *Holy Koran* a picture of the Saudi Sultan Ibn Saud, we currently have no clear evidence<sup>129</sup> to say that non-black or immigrant Muslims were members of his group, nor do we have evidence to support that an idea that is associated with Suleiman—that it is important to

---

<sup>128</sup> Suleiman's dating of the Qur'an is probably the clearest example of this.

<sup>129</sup> There is a photograph of the MST in this period—the convention picture of the group standing in front of a building for the 1928 convention (there is a banner across the top of the picture)—with what appears to possibly be a non-black member. This person is seen standing in the upper left corner of the group and is wearing a light-colored suit and a black bow tie. Some Moorish Americans have in fact claimed that this figure is Fard. Also, interestingly, one post-Drew Ali leader, Grand Sheik Frederick Turner-El, claimed that he attended the Newark MST from 1925 to 1930 and that, at that time, there was a teacher in the MST there from Egypt's al-Azhar. See the MST FBI files. If this is true, it seems unlikely that this teacher was Suleiman.

bring “into closer religious harmony the Negro, Turkish and Syrian Moslems” (fact J)—was indeed valued by Drew Ali.

All in all, it can be said that while Suleiman and Drew Ali and their doctrines shared many *general* features, and did so to a greater extent than we have seen for any other groups with similar doctrines, Drew Ali’s Chicago-era movement, as far as we currently know, was unique.

### **Conclusion: Final Assessment**

The current evidence does not yield a conclusive assertion; at best we can tentatively say that it is *likely* that Drew Ali (and, through him, the MST) was influenced by Suleiman *in some way*.

Our sources do not yet provide us with a direct, unquestionable link between Suleiman and Drew Ali. Nevertheless, the circumstantial evidence is strong, particularly the stories about the Canaanite Temple (fact N) and of a “Dr. Suliman” (number 6). But, lacking other evidence, even these are far from conclusive, as we have not yet been able to determine with certainty which of the stories or elements of the MST legends are legitimate and which are apocryphal or, at best, anachronistic.

We are thus left with more questions than answers. Was Suleiman truly an immigrant? If so, from what country did he emigrate? What were his true Masonic affiliations? What do we make of the reference to the Mecca Medina Temple and Suleiman’s clear similarities to the Dr. Prince de Solomon? Did his movement have international ties or support? How large was his movement overall? What Islamic teachings did he spread? What were the characteristics of his movement’s members? Was Drew Ali influenced by Suleiman? If so, was it simply through an

awareness of Suleiman, or was it by being a member of Suleiman’s movement? Or, was it, as the MST narratives suggest, that Drew Ali started his own movement, with Suleiman possibly as a collaborator, consultant, or competitor? And if they were indeed connected in some way, what are the correct dates for their connected activities—1910, 1913, 1914, 1916, 1918, 1919, 1922, or some other times? Did Drew Ali knowingly capitalize on Suleiman’s likely imprisonment around 1925 to form the MST?

We might also wonder if there is any connection between Suleiman and the various figures encountered in this study. For instance, was there a connection with the Ahmadiyya Movement, which had been drawing a number of African Americans in the North, which employed similar discourses to those of Suleiman, whose main popularizer had begun his U.S. efforts in New York in 1920, and which apparently had been drawing the interest of the African-American Shriner leader? The idea that there is a connection with the Ahmadis is supported by the claim that “many” immigrant and African-American Muslim groups were combining throughout the country under Suleiman (fact J)—Ahmadis were one of the few instigators of such a movement in the early twentieth-century U.S. Could it be that Suleiman had been once connected to the Ahmadis<sup>130</sup> and later, while leading his own (possibly break-off) movement, claimed that the U.S. Ahmadis were in fact aligned with his him instead of Sadiq? Competition

---

<sup>130</sup> I have not been able to find Suleiman or de Solomon in the lists of U.S. Ahmadi members in the early issues of the *Moslem Sunrise*. However, we should also consider the fact that both Sadiq and Suleiman were generally eager to build ties with groups that promoted themes similar to the ones they were interested in. When this and the other evidence presented above is combined with the fact that, like and at the same time as Sadiq, Suleiman was claiming to unify Muslim immigrants and African Americans, there seems to be sufficient evidence to at least consider the possibility that there is a connection.

from Suleiman may explain the apparent failure of the Ahmadi proselytizer, Sadiq, to build communities in the Northeast outside of New York.<sup>131</sup>

But we should also ask where Rabbi Arnold J. Ford, Mohammed Ali,<sup>132</sup> and the many “Mohammedan Scientists” fit into the picture? Going further, given the suspicions that Wallace Fard and Elijah Muhammad were associated in some way with Drew Ali’s group, is it possible that there is a link between Suleiman and the two central figures of the early Nation of Islam?<sup>133</sup> And, while only Suleiman’s group gained any sort of wider public recognition prior to 1926, and the “Prof. Drew” card suggests that Drew Ali did not start off his career using references to Masonry/Shrinedom and the Canaanites, can we completely rule out the possibility that it was Suleiman who was influenced by Drew Ali, not the other way around?

Finally, there is another set of questions to be asked. It is known that a man named Satti Majid,<sup>134</sup> an Islamic teacher from Dongola in the Sudan, arrived in the U.S. in 1904 and set up a number of Islamic organizations—for both immigrants and African Americans—in several places in the Eastern and northern Midwest U.S. He also appears to have been not only aware of Drew Ali, but staunchly against his teachings, and obtained a fatwa against him from al-Azhar in

---

<sup>131</sup> I am making this presumption based on the locations given for U.S. Ahmadi members in the early issues of *Moslem Sunrise*.

<sup>132</sup> It would be interesting to find out whether the Tunisian Mohammed Ali who married Fanny Wise was a source for Drew Ali’s MST Moorish identity.

<sup>133</sup> I am not particularly convinced by any of the evidence that has been presented to show a possible link between Elijah Muhammad and the *Newark* MST or Canaanite Temple. Biographers of Muhammad have not been able to place him in Newark. At least with Fard there is the name Abdul Wali Farrad Mohammed Ali in the MST-origin rumors which may connect him to Suleiman via the figure of Mohammed Ali, the twenty-two-year-old.

<sup>134</sup> See Ahmed I. Abu Shouk, J.O. Hunwick & R.S. O’Fahey, “A Sudanese Missionary to the United States,” *Sudanic Africa* 8 (1997): 137-91.

Cairo. While there are some similarities between Satti and Suleiman/de Solomon—particularly the facts that they were both claiming to be Sudanese, both were in the U.S. at roughly the same time, both promoted multi-racial Islamic groups, and both may have had a relationship with the figure of Drew Ali—certain features suggest that they were not the same person. First is the age difference: While we have various ages attributed to Suleiman/de Solomon, the latest date of birth that can be calculated by the ages given is circa 1870, yet Satti was reportedly born in 1883. And, even assuming that Suleiman had lied about his age, by all accounts in 1922 he was considered an old man—in that year and the next he is always said to be seventy-seven, while Satti would have been around forty. Second: Satti is never connected to Masonry in the available scholarship. Third: We have no evidence of a connection between Satti and any of the groups led by Suleiman/de Solomon; nor do we have connection of a Suleiman/de Solomon to any of Satti's groups. Fourth: De Solomon claimed to have arrived in 1908, not 1904. Fifth: It is almost certain that Satti left the U.S. in 1929, never to return, unlike Suleiman who continued to appear in U.S. Masonic contexts in as late as 1934. Sixth: Satti apparently believed only prophets (which he did not consider himself to be) could perform miracles,<sup>135</sup> and this would seem to conflict with what we know about Suleiman's mystical practices. Seventh: There is currently no evidence for a Meccan connection with Satti, whereas Suleiman repeatedly emphasized his. Still, the main academic source on Satti admits that almost nothing is known about the man's activities between 1904 and 1921,<sup>136</sup> and even after that our knowledge about his time in the U.S. is based only on fragments. Also, Satti claimed to have been attempting to convince Drew Ali to

---

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

conform to international Islam—Could this be Suleiman trying to rein in a former follower? And we do know that Satti went by different names while in the U.S.—Satti Majid, Majid/Magid Mohamed, and Sheikh El-Sayid Majid<sup>137</sup>—Could it be that he used other names as well, perhaps explaining the why most of his activities during his U.S. stay are still unknown? Or, less conspiratorially, we might simply ask whether Suleiman and Satti know each other at all.

Unfortunately, none of these questions can be answered at this time; I can only offer what I think is likely based on the evidence. While I cannot rule out the possibility that the Canaanite Temple had been established prior to 1922, the fact that we have no evidence for it prior to 1923, the fact that we *do* know about a Mecca Medina Temple and we know about Suleiman existing (perhaps many years) before there is ever any mention of a Caananites Temple, and the fact that the business card evidence (number 7) suggests that Drew Ali had been, prior to the forming of the MST, working as a Muslim mystic in Newark and was *not* clearly connected to Suleiman or a Canaanite Temple, the evidence suggests, to me, that it is likely Suleiman himself had started the Caananites Temple in around 1922. It seems reasonable to think that Drew Ali not only had become affiliated with Suleiman’s group in Newark in a way closer than a mere observer, but had also borrowed elements, especially those that connected Islam to Masonry, the Canaanites, and racial uplift, from Suleiman’s teachings or symbols to use in his forming of the MST. Of course, this is all, at best, merely informed speculation on my part.

Still, because a Canaanite Temple in Newark is so central to Drew Ali’s legend, a “Dr. Suliman” was rumored to have been a key figure in the origins of this Temple, and the fact that

---

<sup>137</sup> I am not suggesting that Satti intentionally disguised his names, as these are all clearly variations of the same name. However, the pattern does suggest the possibility that he could have used others.

Drew Ali used Masonic and spiritualistic themes, it appears as if we have discovered one of the main influences for some of the most influential African-American Islamic groups. The figure of Suleiman/de Solomon would go a long way in explaining the peculiar characteristics and origin legends of the MST and NOI—at the very least it would explain the Shriner influence. Perhaps more importantly, we have identified a previously unknown (or at least previously unverified) early African-American Islamic-identity movement; one which was clearly popular in Newark and may have been influential in several other places. Even if there are no direct ties to the MST and NOI, the cultural discourses it produced may have paved the way for later groups.

For now, however, much remains to be uncovered.

### **Postscript**

After finishing this article I came across a story relayed by Muhammed al-Ahari concerning the founding of the Canaanite temple.

In 1905, Drew Ali met an Egyptian, Dr. Sulaiman, and invited him to come back to the United States with him. In 1910, Drew Ali joined Pullman Porters Union. By 1913 he had also become a high level Shriner and a member of the Grotto. It was in that year he started his first temple—the Canaanite Temple—with Dr. Sulaiman. The original name of Drew's movement was the Moorish National and Divine Movement, but was soon changed to Moorish Science Temple of America. At that time, Drew Ali was known as Professor Drew—the Egyptian Adept.<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> Adib Rashad, *Islam, Black Nationalism and Slavery: A Detailed History* (Beltsville, MD: Writers Inc., 1995), 166-167. Rashad cites an unnamed work by al-Ahari. Al-Ahari himself has told me he originally recorded this story in an unpublished paper from the early 1990s; email message to the author, August 11, 2011.

This story is interesting for several reasons. First, it appears to have been the source of McCloud's information about a "Dr. Suliman" (number 6)<sup>139</sup> and it is likely that it was through the influence of McCloud that making a reference to "Dr. Suliman" has become common practice in academic writing on the subject.<sup>140</sup> Second, this story connects Suleiman to the stories about Drew Ali's travels abroad (which have not been covered in this article) and, because the dates in this story correspond roughly to the early dates we have for de Solomon, it supports there perhaps being something factual about those legends. Third, the reference to Drew Ali becoming a high-level Shriner between 1910 and 1913 raises the possibility that Drew Ali had in fact joined de Solomon's/Suleiman's Mecca Medina Temple prior to the establishment of the Canaanite Temple. Fourth, it brings into the narrative Drew Ali's identity of "Egyptian Adept" (number 7), although it tells us little about how this identity related to his MST group. In the end, this story not only provides us with a few more clues about Suleiman, it also serves as a reminder that, despite the fact that the new information presented in this article may lead us to doubt even more than we might have in the past some of the narratives about Drew Ali's life before the MST, we should not rush to dismiss them as merely pious fictions.

---

<sup>139</sup> McCloud does not explicitly cite a source for her reference to "Dr. Suliman," but does refer to al-Ahari's work on the MST in general.

<sup>140</sup> For McCloud's likely influence on the academic references to "Dr. Suliman," see the note for story number 6.